The Problem of Jesus's Literacy

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October/2025

ABSTRACT

This study informs and analyses the difficulty in resolving the issue of Jesus' literacy or illiteracy, especially due to the plurality of literacy levels, depending on the time and context. Then, the first criterion we must consider is which sources to trust, whether the canonical gospels and/or the apocryphal texts, or both, because both are the combination of historicity and fiction, the difference between the two is only in the degrees of historicity of each. If trust is placed exclusively in the canonical gospels, the conclusion is that he was, most likely, illiterate. However, if, on the other hand, trust is placed solely in the apocryphal gospels, the result is that he was perhaps not only literate, but also, most likely, a prodigious student. And if, finally, trust is placed in both evangelical sources, the result may be a probable amorphous mixture of the two sources. In all cases, the results will be limited to the realms of possibility, because it is not possible to be certain with the scarce and dubious data available.
KEYWORDS: Jesus' Literacy, Literacy, Illiteracy, Textual Criticism, Literacy in Greek-roman Palestine

Part One

I.01. Introduction

Over time, when a teaching attains importance far beyond what was previously anticipated, without the abundance and precision of data necessary to meet this relevance, the result is what we find in the growing study of Christianity over the years, and even more so today: a disproportion between extreme scrutiny and the scarcity of precise and clear data, resulting in a multitude of conjectural theories and assumptions. Certainly, the early Christian authors did not imagine the great expansion of the movement in which they were involved, so they did not care much about the literary and historical rigor of their writings, or lacked the capacity to do so. From a small and humble sect of Judaism, which began as a group of poor and illiterate people, it later developed into a religion with the largest following today. As it began, its first texts (later considered canonical and apocryphal), like the propagandist impulse of other religions, were written for the purpose of evangelization, with the aim of advancing a proselytizing and catechetical agenda. In other words, their authors were followers and admirers engaged in a missionary project; therefore, they were not historians. Thus, these authors' interest in the rigor of historicity in the accounts of Jesus' sayings and deeds was overshadowed by their laudatory and admiring impulses, and consequently, their lack of concern for the accuracy of the records, since these authors were not historians, but rather admiring followers, some even dazzled followers.

Added to these problems is the large number of texts destroyed by Church leaders during Antiquity and the Middle Ages in order to eliminate ideas and practices contrary to the missionary and catechetical project. Consequently, what we have today is a scarce and imprecise surviving literature from the early years of Christianity, almost entirely from the exclusive perspective of followers, and much

scarce data remaining from the perspective of neutral authors or those opposed to the early Christian movement. Accounts contemporary to Jesus are nonexistent. Similarly, this is the case with sources of information about Jesus' literacy: the data are scarce, imprecise, and of dubious historicity. With growth, the result is that today we have an infinitely greater availability of Christian writings, from the perspective of confessional authors, whether canonical or apocryphal, and a very small amount of information from the perspective of those outside the early Christian movement. And when we do have the latter, it is through heresiologists and Christian historians (Irenaeus, Eusebius, etc.), writing to counter criticism, citing excerpts from the works of heretics. Therefore, only fragments and edited materials remain, based on the Christian authors' selections.

The result is the high degree of scrutiny among current biblical scholars, faced with the scarce and imprecise data provided by the Bible and early Christian works, compared to what they hope to extract from these texts. This leads to the formation of so many conjectures and speculative theories by scholars eager to find, in the Bible and the apocryphal texts, answers to textual, theological, and historical problems regarding the sayings and deeds of Jesus through conjectural explanations. Another complicating factor is that ancient and classical languages do not have the same semantic and scientific precision as contemporary languages, as they are more poetic, ambiguous, and metaphorical, with very different morphology, grammar, and syntax. Contemporary languages, on the other hand, are more precise and scientific, which better fits the current mindset. Therefore, a certain degree of interpretation, and even conjecture in more complex cases, is required when translating an ancient language into a modern language, especially among those that have not had contemporary contact in the past. Under close scrutiny, many passages are conjectural translations, resulting in discrepancies in translations.

I.2. Literacy and Illiteracy in Antiquity

Broadly speaking, literacy can be defined as the ability to read and write at one of several levels (MACDONALD, 2006: 45 and KEITH, 2009: 53). A literate society is one in which reading and writing have become essential to its functioning, either for the entire society or for certain vital aspects of its functioning, such as bureaucracy, economic and commercial activities, or religious life. Thus, a society can be literate because it uses the written word in some of its vital functions, even if most of its individuals are not able to read and write, as this was the case in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. An illiterate society is an oral society, like one in which literacy is not essential to any of its activities—for example, a rural society, where planting, harvesting, and raising livestock do not require literacy. Thus, memory and oral communication perform the functions that reading and writing perform within a literate society. However, the four dimensions are not extremes, like "black and white," as there are degrees of literacy and illiteracy depending on the environment and the time period, as we will see later.

What we understand by literacy today is very different from what the ancients understood it. Currently, the skills of reading and writing are understood as inseparable. In modern education, the ability to read is developed simultaneously with the ability to write, and then, shortly thereafter, the ability to compose, known as compositional literacy, develops. Therefore, it is rare today to find someone capable of reading but not capable of writing, or vice versa. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, these skills were not developed in the manner of modern education; they were separate skills. It was common for someone to know how to read but not write, or vice versa. Even less so was the ability to compose a text or discuss what they read. Therefore, the gap between the ability to read and the ability to write in antiquity and the Middle Ages was much greater than it is today, where these skills are developed simultaneously and continue to evolve throughout the literate person's life. Therefore,

when we study literacy in the past, we should not assume that these were, at the time, inseparable skills, as we understand them today. For many literacy learners in the past, the culmination of literacy instruction was compositional literacy. That is, elementary education concluded with compositional literacy, which enabled them to write texts for everyday activities, such as notes, letters, contracts, receipts, notices, wills, etc. This, in turn, did not enable them to understand or compose more complex and extensive texts, such as a book. In that environment, compositional writing was the highest level of educational attainment for the majority of the population. It should be noted here that "compositional writing" must be distinguished from the ability to copy, just as the ability to copy complex literary texts must be distinguished from the ability to copy, for example, a contract. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, it was common to use semi-literate copyists to reproduce texts—that is, semi-literates who knew how to reproduce the letters of a text but did not understand the meaning of what they copied, something like the practice of copying figures. Meanwhile, post-literacy compositional learning was for the very few, restricted to large urban centers with formal schools, academies, and libraries. In the past, many learners learned to read and write at home, through their parents or close relatives. Therefore, formal education, beyond compositional literacy, was a privilege for a select few, for economic or geographic reasons. Until the Industrial Revolution, most populations lived in rural areas, where schools were precarious, expensive, and distant, or even absent, making it rare for students to reach the highest levels of the pedagogical process. This is very different from today's education, where public education is available to all and provided in a large network of state-supported public schools, reaching even the most remote and isolated rural regions, including indigenous villages. Consequently, in antiquity, the most literate civilizations (China, India, Greece, Rome, and Persia) stood out among their illiterate or less literate counterparts. Ultimately, in ancient societies, the knowledge of reading and writing, as well as the ability to perform

mathematical operations, was confined to a small minority, many of whom did not even achieve compositional literacy, much less erudition. This is very different from today, where the majority of populations are not only literate, but, more than that, educated in many disciplines.

Humanity has always lived in an information society, and thus, those who control and restrict access to knowledge consequently control a large portion of the power. Even before the invention of writing, oral communication was controlled by rulers and religious figures. Therefore, persuasion, censorship, and manipulation are not recent inventions; they have existed since the emergence of spoken language. As we will see later, "there are illiterate scholars" (HARRIS, 1991: 4), although they are rare. This last sentence sounds, to the ears of a modern individual, like a paradox, since it is currently understood that every scholar must be literate. But it wasn't like that in the past. The concept of literate and illiterate depends on the era and context, because, in a nearly entirely illiterate society, someone who, in Antiquity, reached at least the level of "compositional literacy" was seen by the vast illiterate population as a scholar. Comparatively, in today's schooling, literacy is learned by children in the first years of school, followed by the learning of school subjects (mathematics, geography, history, biology, physics, etc.). Therefore, a child with only two or three years of schooling is more literate than almost the entire population in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, including the compositional literates of that era. The degree of compositional literacy in Antiquity must have been equivalent to the first two years of schooling today, since a child, at this stage, can already write a composition. In other words, while in modern education literacy is the initial step in schooling, in ancient times it was the opposite. Compositional literacy—that is, the ability to compose a simple text, such as a letter, which a child is capable of doing in the first years of school—was the culmination of the educational process for almost everyone. Chris Keith suggested that the process might be as follows: “At an early stage, students

learned to recognize the letters of the alphabet and, sometimes, reproduce them mechanically. Building on this skill, students were then instructed in a second stage of recognizing syllables, words, and eventually sentences. Only after a student had mastered this skill and could associate himself with literature could he (or, more rarely, she) move on to the advanced stage of copying or compositional writing" (KEITH, 2009: 70). Regarding literacy in antiquity, researchers distinguish between "scribal literacy" and "artisan literacy." Scribal literacy was a profession in the past; scribes were hired to read or write texts for illiterate families, and some worked in imperial courts, writing down records or transcribing edicts and performing other bureaucratic tasks. A literate artisan was one who mastered literacy only within the limits of his profession—that is, enough to communicate in writing with his employers or fellow workers.

Thus, when one learns about the intellectual achievements of the ancient Greeks, Indians, Chinese, and Romans, one projects onto these peoples the idea that they were generally literate civilizations. However, historical and anthropological research points to the fact that only a small minority enjoyed this literacy, while the vast majority of the population was illiterate and therefore communicated orally, as they lived in rural areas, where they neither had the opportunity nor the need for literacy. Therefore, someone who reads the works of Plato or Aristotle is captivated by the erudition of these authors for their time, and may be led to believe that most Greeks also possessed this level of literacy. Similarly, someone familiar with the extensive and ancient Vedic and Buddhist literature of the Indians may be led to believe that literacy was widespread among the population in ancient India. This is misleading; these and other civilizations were largely oral civilizations with high illiteracy rates in the past. In conclusion, literacy was the privilege of a very few. Mass literacy never existed in any region or period in the ancient world, as mass literacy is a contemporary phenomenon.

I.03. Orality in the Past

Oral communication was more prevalent in antiquity, from the Middle Ages until the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century than it is today. However, orality is not synonymous with ignorance when considering the time and context, specifically in antiquity. Before the invention of writing, knowledge was transmitted orally, so much was learned through oral instruction. Even today, there are social groups within a literate society that have chosen to remain illiterate in order to better dedicate themselves to their peasant activities, which do not require literacy (MACDONALD, 2006: 47). Martyn Lyons defended oral culture as follows: “The problem with writing was that it destroyed, it ruined, the capacity for memorization, which in some oral societies was highly developed. In any group, the memory of the elders was a vast repertoire of history and tradition. As one man from Mali said, ‘In Africa, every time an elder dies, it’s like a library burning down’” (Lyons, 2010: 16-7). Much can be learned through oral instruction. The best-known example that pre-literate societies possessed a considerable body of knowledge for their time is the fact that many ancient texts have survived. were transmitted for centuries through oral communication, and these possessed enviable knowledge for the time, before being transcribed into written form, for example: the Vedic hymns in India and the hymns of Homer in Greece. A curious example is Indo-European, a proto-language reconstructed through the historical-comparative method of Historical Linguistics, which gave rise to the refined languages: Sanskrit, Greek, Persian, and Latin. The grammatical and poetic refinement of these four classical languages points to the fact that Indo-European was also, or even more, a highly refined, exclusively spoken language, since, to date, no written text of this proto-language has been found; consequently, it lacked an alphabet, not even a pictogram, ideogram, or hieroglyph. Therefore, a curious example of how a language that was only spoken can develop a sophisticated grammar is one of the daughters of Indo-European,

Sanskrit, which is a formidable example of how a language, initially only spoken, was able to develop such refined grammar, poetry, prosody, and euphony before the introduction of writing in India.

Regarding orality in Ancient India, Johannes Bronkhorst observed: "Several (Indian) texts were transmitted orally, as some are to this day, and it is difficult to discover exactly which texts fell into this category at any given period. The Brahmins, sometimes called the literate caste, were in reality primarily ritual specialists who knew their sacred texts by heart. They could perform their ritual tasks without literacy, and there can be no doubt that many learned Brahmins were, strictly speaking, illiterate" (BRONKHORST, 2002: 01). When we learn about the mnemonic recitation techniques created and developed by Brahmin reciters in the past to increase their memorization of Vedic texts—perhaps the only ones in history to reach such a level of sophistication—we are struck by their sheer creativity. Furthermore, the complexity of Vedic rituals and sacrifices exemplifies how much can be learned from oral instruction.

Continuing on orality in India, Johannes Bronkhorst also noted in a note: “Even in the 20th century... there are hundreds of Brahmins who learn not only the entire Rigveda... by heart, but also memorize the pada text of the Rigveda, the Aitareya Brâhmana and the Aranyaka, and the six Vedāngas (which include the 4,000 aphorisms of Pānini and the extensive Nirukta of Yaska) without bothering to understand a word of this enormous material.” And Bühler stated in the 19th century: “A Vaidik (Vedic) Brahmin of the Āshwalāyana school knows the Rigveda according to the Samhitā, Pāda, Krama, Jathā, and Ghana Pāthas[1], the Aitareya Brāhmana and the Aranyaka, the ritualistic Sutras of Āshwalāyana, the Prâtishākhya of Shawnaka and the Siksha, the Nirukta of Yâska, the grammar of Pānini, the Vedic calendar or Jyotisha, the metrical treatise called the Chandas, the Dharmasāstra of Yājñavalkya, portions of the Mahābhārata, and the philosophical Shatras of

1 These are the different recitation techniques (Pathās) of Vedic hymns to strengthen memorization.

Kanāda, Jaimini, and Bādarāyana. Similarly, the Vaidik Brahmins of the Yajur schools, Såman, and Atharvan are able to recite, more or less perfectly, the entire works of their respective Shākhās (Vedic schools), as well as some other non-Vedic books. But it would be in vain to expect from such men an explanation of the literary treasures they possess." Unfortunately, Kane does not tell us how completely the other texts (other than the Rgveda) are being memorized, nor does Bühler specify how many Brahmin Vaidiks there were in his time. My own very limited contacts with one of Poona's most respected Vedic reciters, Pandit Kinjawadekar Shastri, informed me that his knowledge of the Rigveda and its pāda and krama pāthas was absolutely impressive, but that this same traditional scholar (who in fact admitted not understanding the content of what he recited) had difficulty with a passage from the Aitareya Aranyaka (or was it the Upanishad?) that I asked him to recite" (BRONKHORST, 2002: 02n4). Note that these reciters recite this enormous amount of text without reading it, only from memory, thus exemplifying the great effectiveness of the Vedic memorization technique. Also, Yijing (636-713 CE),[2] a Buddhist monk who visited and resided in India, wrote in the 7th century CE: "The Vedas have been transmitted by word of mouth, not transcribed on paper or in leaves." And Al-Biruni (973-1048 CE), a Persian polymath scientist who also resided in India for about ten years, wrote in the 11th century CE: "The Brahmins recite the Veda without understanding its meaning, and in the same way they learn it by heart, one transmitting it to the other (orally). Only a few of them learn its meaning, and even fewer are those who master the contents of the Veda and its interpretation to the point of being able to hold a theological debate" (Idem: 02).

The above examples were presented to demonstrate that, given that today's culture relies so heavily on written communication,

2 He resided and studied at the then prestigious Buddhist university of Nalanda, northern India, destroyed during the first Muslim invasion, learned Sanskrit and translated about 60 Buddhist works from Sanskrit into Chinese.

modern individuals have no idea what oral communication was capable of achieving in the past. Therefore, the above examples are presented to clarify that, respecting evolutionary distance, erudition in the past was acquired orally. Pieter Craffert and Pieter Botha, along with other authors, recognized the importance of this factor in antiquity. "The magical aspects related to reading and writing techniques, although largely unknown to us, were an important element of ancient communication technologies" (BOTHA, 2005: 29). Therefore, in the case of Jesus, the idea that much of what he taught (parables, scriptural quotations, sermons) may have been learned orally is not dismissed. Finally, the fact of quoting passages from the scriptures does not invariably mean that the quote was learned through reading, therefore it is necessary to be literate to know the sacred texts, because, otherwise, the passages could have been learned orally, since we have no records that Jesus attended the Jewish schools in Jerusalem or the cultural centers in the region. Therefore, Pieter Botha and Pieter F. Craffert observed: “With regard to the historical Jesus, we can clearly say that, as a Galilean peasant, the most plausible description of him would be that he was illiterate—particularly when viewed in terms of what we understand literacy to mean. As a Galilean peasant, he was, at best, able to recognize a few letters (which also include numbers) and interpret some names and/or inscriptions. What we call reading is ‘reading with understanding,’ an activity limited to only a few people in antiquity. Even those skilled with texts and documents did not read as we do, as the rabbis illustrate in writing” (BOTHA, 2005: 31).[3]

3 This experience of being semi-literate can be felt by an adult who begins studying a language with an alphabet different from that used in their native language. I experienced this when I began studying Sanskrit in India in the 1980s, since the first step in learning is to memorize the alphabet—in the case of Sanskrit, the Devanagari alphabet. The initial feeling is that the learner is illiterate, and when they memorize the alphabet, they begin to identify written words that they previously knew only orally or through transliteration—something like an adult literacy experience. Even more curious was when I began to identify words

Finally, due to the majority of oral learning, being illiterate in antiquity did not mean being as unprepared as it is today, when, on the contrary, almost everyone is more than literate; they are educated.

I.04. Literacy and Illiteracy in Greco-Roman Palestine in the First Century CE

Although censuses were not conducted in antiquity to determine the number of literate and illiterate people, as is done today, historians and researchers have ventured to estimate, through approximate percentages, the proportion of illiterate people at that time. Therefore, William Harris proposed that the likely overall level of illiteracy in the Roman Empire was above 90% (HARRIS, 1991: 22 and KEITH, 2009: 54). Although the exact literacy rate among ancient Jews cannot be determined, Meier Bar-Ilan's suggestion that the Jewish literacy rate must have been lower than the Roman literacy rate in the first centuries CE seems very plausible. Whether the average literacy rate among Palestinian Jews was only 3%, as Bar-Ilan calculated, or slightly higher (BAR-ILAN, 1992: 12), must remain open. The question naturally depends on what is meant by "literacy." If "literacy" is determined by the ability to read documents, letters, and "simple" literary texts in at least one language and to write more than one's own signature, it is quite reasonable to assume that the Jewish literacy rate was well below the 10-15% (of the entire population, including women) that Harris estimated for Roman society in the imperial era. If by "literacy" we mean the ability

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written in another language that also uses the Devanagari alphabet, Hindi, a language derived from Sanskrit still spoken in many regions of the Indian continent, in my case in Mumbai (Bombay at that time), because I could identify the words on signs, on buses, in newspapers and on billboards, especially those with similar spelling, but I could not understand the meaning of all of them, since Hindi vocabulary is different from Sanskrit.

to read a few words and sentences, and writing only their own signature, the Jews probably approached the average Roman rate more closely—that is, the Jews were less literate than the Romans. While exact figures cannot be verified or falsified and are therefore of little historical value, the average Jewish literacy rate (of any level) must be considered lower than the average Roman rate" (HEZSER, 2001: 496 and BAR-ILAN, 1992: 02). Catherine Hezser's studies concluded that Jewish literacy was "quite low," even lower than William Harris's figures. Illiteracy in that region was so high that she termed the few areas of formal literacy, as well as the exclusive focus on religious instruction, in Roman Palestine "pockets of Hebrew religious literacy" (HEZSER, 2020: 12). Most recent studies in each of these contexts unanimously reveal an overall low literacy rate. Very different from today, when one looks around, everyone is literate and educated, while in Palestine in the first century BCE, it was the opposite: when one looked at its stench, almost everyone was illiterate. Therefore, one should not view the education and culture of that region and that time with the eyes of today; first of all, one must project a new perspective. diachronic and historical.

Catherine Hezser also observed: "Unlike Greco-Roman elementary schools, Jewish schools, of which we know from rabbinic sources, appear not to have taught practical writing skills, or to have taught such skills only in rare cases. They preferred to prepare boys for the task of reading the Torah in public." (...) because "the goal of Jewish schools was to increase the number of Torah readers, excluding girls from the beginning, since girls were not allowed to serve as readers in synagogues" (HEZSER, 2001: 497). Drawing from Jewish sources, Meier Bar-ilan explained it this way: "Children were taught to read the Bible, but not necessarily to write (Avot de-Rabbi Natan, A 6, p. 29). In ancient times, specialization in writing involved the complicated techniques of preparing all the writing tools: parchment, stylus, and ink. Therefore, it was impossible to teach advanced writing skills to young children (as is the case today), so this level of instruction had to be postponed until the age of 14–15,

after the elementary stage (Jub 11:16; P.T. Ketubbot 8:11, 32c). That is, even among those who could read, many, or more precisely, the majority, could not write" (quoted by KEITH, 2009: 77). Furthermore, when we look beyond basic literacy, Jewish teachers did not teach subjects other than the Jewish religion. Therefore, we never hear of the teaching of philosophy, science, arts, geometry, etc., as in the academies of Athens, the schools of Alexandria, and Rome in Jewish schools. Consequently, there were no secular philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, geographers, geometers, or playwrights among the Israelites at that time in Palestine. Education, besides being scarce and precarious, was exclusively religious, even in Jerusalem. Therefore, the most concrete example is that the Israelites never had an encyclopedic philosopher like Aristotle at that time.

Since we do not have data collected through census or surveys in Palestine in the first century CE, Meier, using recent research data on the proportions between literate people in urban areas and literate people in rural areas, projected them into the past. Therefore, it is possible to at least estimate the high illiteracy rate in Antiquity when compared with relatively recent rates. That is, if so recently, even after the Industrial Revolution, it is possible to find such high illiteracy rates, imagine what it would have been like in Antiquity, and even more so in rural areas. For example, in the first half of the 20th century CE, the following countries had the following high illiteracy rates: Turkey in 1927 = 91.8%; Egypt in 1927 = 85.7%; South Africa in 1921 = 90.3%; India in 1921 = 90.5%; Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia before 1950 = above 90% (BAR-ILAN, 1992: 02). Meier Bar-ilan estimated that: "in the time of the Maccabees and at the end of the biblical period, the literacy rate of the Jewish people was 1,5%, if not less." And that "in rural areas, this rate could be as low as 0,5%" (BAR-ILAN, 1992: 12). He cited the following examples from Jewish books: "A village where there is only one who reads, he stands, reads (the Torah), and sits down, he stands, reads, and sits down, even seven times." In other words, in

some villages there was only one person capable of reading the Torah, even though it was a highly valued practice in Judaism, because in rural areas there were few who were able to read. In another text, the word "village" is replaced by "a synagogue where there is only one (who reads)." These quotations portray the scarcity of literate people in the ancient Land of Israel, and there is no record that these rates were different in the region and at the time of Jesus (BAR-ILAN, 1992: 11).

Furthermore, there were no cultural centers in the vicinity of where Jesus lived; the nearby cities of Tiberias and Sepphoris only became cultural centers. urban areas from 70 CE onwards, especially at the end of Antiquity (5th century CE), the cultural center was concentrated in Jerusalem (HEZSER, 2020: 16). Therefore, the argument of some Christians, who believe in Jesus' literacy, that he received his education in Tiberias is not confirmed by archaeological or historical findings, since the Roman-style public buildings unearthed at the site so far date from the beginning of the first century CE; they appear to have been built from the time when the city was expanded and completely remodeled as a Roman city (polis) in the late first and early second centuries CE. Thus, before 70 CE, Tiberias appears to have been a village or a town only rudimentarily developed (Ibid., 16-7). Therefore, to solve the enigma, it is necessary to assume that Jesus traveled to distant places during the pre-missionary period, and consequently to believe the accounts extra-canonical. Finally, it has been proven that there is a close relationship between agriculture and literacy. That is, the more agricultural a society, the higher the illiteracy rate, and Jesus lived in a rural region, if we rely solely on the accounts in the canonical Gospels (for more information, see: BAR-ILAN, 1992; HEZSER 2001 and 2020).

Meier Bar-ilan demonstrated the rural/urban relationship of illiteracy as follows, according to data from 1930:

North America: overall percentage of illiterates = 4%; percentage of peasants = 25%

Europe: overall percentage of illiterates = 15%; percentage of peasants = 36%
South America: overall percentage of illiterates = 59%; percentage of peasants = 72%
Asia: overall percentage of illiterates = 81%; Percentage of peasants = 69%
Africa: Overall percentage of illiterates = 88%; percentage of peasants = 77% (BAR-ILAN, 1992: 04).

Note that the higher the proportion of peasants in a region, the higher the overall percentage of illiterates in that region, and the lower the proportion of peasants, the lower the overall proportion of illiterates, demonstrating that illiteracy was very prevalent in rural areas in the past. If in 1930, a relatively recent date, the illiteracy situation was this, when the process of mass literacy and schooling had already begun in many parts of the world, consequently, before the beginning of this large-scale education process, illiteracy rates in rural areas were even higher, certainly very high in antiquity.

Catherine Hezser explained it this way: “When discussing literacy in Galilee, we need to consider the predominantly rural occupation of the population. With the exception of a minority of artisans, the vast majority of Galilean Jews worked in agriculture, as smallholders, tenant farmers, or farm laborers. As such, they would have had little need to learn to read and write. Purchase and sale contracts were oral agreements, binding by oaths and attested by witnesses. It can be assumed that land ownership would have been recorded and tax receipts delivered to the local population by Roman officials. But this would have concerned only landowners. Large landowners bought and sold land and paid large sums in taxes, activities for which they desired documentation. The smallholder, who worked his own land all his life and bequeathed it to his eldest son upon his death, may never have needed written documents. The effort and costs may simply have been too great for something that was considered unnecessary” (HEZSER, 2020: 18). Furthermore, "it appears that until 70 CE, the development of Galilean urban centers

was quite limited. From the second half of the first century CE, Tiberias appears to have been the only city proper, but evidence of its cultural importance comes from Late Antiquity. Throughout the Second Temple period, Jerusalem remained the political, economic, and religious center" (Idem, 20).

However, it is important to note that "in the social context of Roman Judea and early Christianity, four issues impede an academic understanding of 'literacy,' namely: the polyglot nature of societies; the presence of literacy degrees; the differences between reading and writing; and the phenomenon of sacred literacy" (KEITH, 2009: 55).

I.05. Polyglot Societies

An example of polyglotism in Palestine at the time of Jesus is Pontius Pilate's inscription of the ironic phrase "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, on the cross where Jesus was nailed (John 19:19-20; Mark 15:26; Matthew 27:37). Therefore, in the first century CE, it is possible to confirm the presence of at least five languages spoken in that region: Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew, Latin, and Nabataean.[4] The first three languages were commonly used, while the fifth is rarely epigraphically confirmed. The written remains of Galilee confirm that "Greek was the primary public written language in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods in Palestine. Aramaic, on the other hand, was rarely used in writing, except for the informal and private marking of ossuaries and clay vessels" (HEZSER, 2020: 17). Regarding Aramaic, Catherine Hezser observed: "Aramaic was the spoken

4 The Nabataeans were an ancient Semitic people, ancestors of the Arabs, who inhabited northern Arabia, southern Jordan and Canaan, as well as the border region between Syria and Arabia. Their capital was the magnificent Petra (frequently visited by tourists today for its beautiful rock carvings), an important commercial center and a transit point for travelers along the Silk Road in the past.

language of Galilean Jews, but its use in writing was almost nonexistent before 70 CE. The reason for this situation is probably the lack of need for writing (and reading) among rural Aramaic-speaking Jews in the late Second Temple period" (Idem, 18). The use of Latin, however, was restricted to Roman authorities, although Latin would become increasingly common and, consequently, the primary language of the Roman Empire. Thus, as many Christians believe, the phrase in three languages in the canonical passage above is an example of that literacy was popular in first-century CE Palestine. On the contrary, literacy in that region was very low (between 5 and 3%). However, it should be noted that some Jews undoubtedly developed rudimentary reading and writing skills, but for many researchers, this likely meant the ability to write their own names. Thus, the average villager would likely have had difficulty composing a letter, as well as lacking the technical skills to draft a will or a contract. Therefore, the publication of the phrase "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" could not have been intended for the majority of the population, but rather for the few who were literate, in any of these languages, as it was a very common custom in antiquity for the literate to read writings to the illiterate, even to the point where scribes were hired to read or draft documents. For example, the flag of the state where I reside displays the Latin phrase "Libertas quae sera tamen" (Liberty, however late), but this inscription doesn't mean that most residents of my state can read Latin. After all, something is not always published for everyone to read. Also, the US one-dollar bill contains phrases in Latin, which doesn't mean that the majority of the American population can read this ancient language.

Thus, the polyglot nature of early Christianity, in some ways, complicates the understanding, as well as the assessment, of literacy in that region. Chris Keith, citing Gamble, described the scenario thus: "A Christian in first-century CE Palestine could be fully literate in Aramaic, well-literate in Hebrew, semi-literate in Greek, and illiterate in Latin, while a Christian in Rome in the second century CE could be literate in Latin, semi-literate in Greek, but ignorant of

Aramaic and Hebrew" (KEITH, 2009: 56). For, in a polyglot society, not everyone is literate in all common languages, just as it was possible to find the presence of individuals who were illiterate in all languages. Therefore, when we want to know whether someone is literate in a polyglot society, we must first ask in which language(s) this individual is literate, and in which they are not. For a Greek might consider a Jew who did not know Greek to be illiterate, and vice versa. The Greek, Hebrew, and Latin languages are used in different alphabets, so to read and write them, you need to know their respective alphabets. In antiquity, and even more so today, there was, and still is, the practice of writing a language originally written in a given alphabet using another alphabet. This practice is called transliteration. For example, the Greek word for Jesus is ἰησοῦς; the transliteration into the Latin alphabet is "iesous," and the translation into Latin is "Jesus." Therefore, transliteration is not the same as translation. Transliteration has helped, and still helps, the understanding of another language through another alphabet. This practice is widely used in countries with many languages and many different alphabets, such as India (for more details on polyglotism in first-century Palestine, see: Harris, 1991: 188-90 and Meier, 1991: vol. I, 253-68).

I.06. Degrees of Literacy

In its most familiar sense, "literacy refers primarily to the ability to read and write," although there are obviously wide variations in reading and writing skills, making literacy not so easy to define due to its nuances. "Literacy is not a concept determinable by well-defined boundaries, since it is susceptible to variation in context and level" (KEITH, 2009: 56n15). The most common definition, "the ability to read and write," does not cover all circumstances, all levels, and all historical and regional contexts. Chris Keith, citing Harry Y. Gamble, presented a more comprehensive and graduated definition of literacy: "Literacy can be understood as anything from signature

literacy (the ability to write one's own name), to the ability to decipher a brief and precise message, to the functional literacy of artisans, to the developed skills of reading and understanding extensive literary texts" (KEITH, 2009: 57). Therefore, it is essential to consider the needs, levels, and periods. Therefore, a precise definition of "literacy" depends not only on the specific language used, but also on the task to be performed according to the craft. In the ancient context, however, an adequate understanding of "literate" individuals can only be gained by comparing them with those who are "semi-literate" and "illiterate".

A division that facilitates understanding the degrees of literacy in antiquity, following an ascending order of graduation, is the following: artisan literacy; the literacy of the merchant and the literacy of the scribe. A similar process occurs when learning a foreign language, which can follow the following gradation: only rudimentary, only conversational, capable of academic reading, and capable of academic writing. This experience was as real in antiquity as it is today, as someone learning a foreign language, and even more so when that language is written with a different alphabet. Regarding the semi-literate, William Harris defined them as "people who can write slowly or not at all, and who can read without being able to read long and complex texts" (Harris, 1991: 5). This group may include those individuals who may have been literate enough to sign their own names or read signs, and enough to participate in local affairs to a greater or lesser extent. Regarding literacy in Jesus' time, Chris Keith, citing Lemire, wrote: "Many Israelites undoubtedly learned rudimentary reading and writing, but for many this probably meant the ability to write their own names. The average villager would probably have had difficulty composing a letter, and probably lacked the ability to draft a will or a contract" (KEITH, 2009: 58). Catherine Hezser offered an apt description of the gradation of reading in Roman Judea as follows: “A model running from the center to the periphery of concentric circles can be applied to Jewish reading practices in Roman Palestine: At the center, one must imagine a very

small number of highly literate people who could read literary texts in both Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek. Then there was another, slightly wider circle of people who could read literary texts only in Hebrew/Aramaic or Greek. They were surrounded by people who could not read literary texts, but only short letters, lists, and accounts. A larger proportion of the population may have been able to identify individual letters, names, and labels. They, like the vast majority of their completely illiterate contemporaries, had access to the texts only through intermediaries" (HEZSER, 2001: 473). As we have already explained above, being illiterate did not mean being ignorant in ancient times. In those days, much more than today, people learned a great deal through oral communication, as ancient societies were more oral than literate. If this were the case, all peoples before the invention of writing were ignorant, which is not true. With the invention of writing, illiterate and semi-literate individuals recognized and respected literacy, as it was possible to perceive the power of literacy in society, as it allowed individuals access to knowledge not available through oral communication. Consequently, literate individuals were the holders of power. When we consider the degree of literacy, it becomes more difficult to identify the completely illiterate individual in the past.

Part Two

II. The Literacy of Jesus According to the Canonical Gospels

II.01. The Gap in the Canonical Gospels

As a general rule, an individual acquires literacy in childhood, and the Canonical Gospels present a narrative gap in Jesus' life from the ages of 12 to 30. Consequently, much curiosity has been aroused to know what Jesus did during this omitted period. One of the best-known conjectures is that Jesus lived with the Essenes, a now-disappeared Jewish community. Consequently, a heated debate has raged between those who accept the hypothesis that Jesus was an Essene and those who disagree, resulting in a relatively extensive literature on the subject. Thus, many comparative studies have been conducted between Jesus' teachings in the Gospels and data extracted from the short accounts left by Flavius Josephus, Pliny the Elder, and Philo of Alexandria. The most extensive information is that of Flavius Josephus, who claimed to have lived with the Essenes, taking into account both similarities and differences. The debate became even more heated after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, whose texts, such as the Rule of the Community, the Damascus Document, and the Rule of the Congregation, exhibit similarities, in part, with the ideas and practices of the Essenes, thus adding more information about this ancient Jewish community. Although these texts present curious differences with the accounts of the three authors cited above, not all researchers agree that these texts are Essenes, much less that they closely resemble the teachings of Jesus. This curiosity was then satisfied in the past with the composition of texts such as the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, and the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, all considered apocryphal, in which Jesus'

literacy experiences are recounted in a mythological and exalted manner, as we will see later.

The fact that apocryphal literature exhibits a more fanciful and fictional character does not negate the fact that the Canonical New Testament is also replete with fiction. Generally speaking, when compared as a whole, that is, the apocryphal texts are indeed more fictional, taking into account the exceptions, than the canonical texts. However, the difference is only one of degree, not a strict contrast—that is, the dichotomy that the Canonical New Testament is historical in its entirety, while the apocryphal texts are fictional in their entirety, as all Christians believe today. Therefore, due to the historical ambiguity of both collections of texts, the study below will consider both canonical and apocryphal passages.

II.02. The Alleged Literacy of Jesus in the Canonical Gospels

When we analyze whether Jesus was literate or illiterate, or even a bit of both, the first criterion we must consider is which sources to trust: the canonical gospels and/or the apocryphal texts, or both. If trust is placed in the canonical gospels, the conclusion is that he was most likely illiterate. However, if, on the other hand, trust is placed in the apocryphal gospels, the result is that he was perhaps not only literate but also, most likely, a student prodigy. And if, finally, trust is placed in both gospel sources, the result may be a probable amorphous mixture of the two sources. In all cases, the results will be limited by the limits of possibility. Apocryphal texts are almost completely disbelieved by researchers and academic historians due to their more mythological character and later composition than the canonical gospels. Similarly, it is important to note that not everything in the canonical gospels is history. For, as we will see later, in the discussion of Jesus' literacy, the fact is that the question cannot be resolved with any degree of certainty. As with much research related to antiquity, conclusions are largely based on probabilities, even more so when we have little evidence. Therefore, John P. Meier

observed: "It is troubling to recognize, as here, as so often in Jesus research, that we arrive at our conclusions not from direct, clear, and indubitable texts, but more often than not by indirect arguments, inference, and converging lines of probability" (MEIER, 1991, vol. I, 278). These observations are more relevant to the mindset of scholars in religious circles and among theologians. However, they are largely absent, for example, from the mindset of scientists in the natural sciences, where theories are more consistent. Almost all researchers in the former are religious believers or teachers in religious schools or courses. Therefore, their work is mostly published in publishers, newspapers, and religious magazines, bringing a conjectural mindset to their research. In other words, there are more conjectural explanations than indisputable confirmations, meaning that almost all explanatory theories are open to challenge, and thus we always find opposing theories. Therefore, the clues to Jesus' literacy present in the canonical New Testament are few and very brief, and the most extensive ones appear in texts of low credibility (the apocrypha), making their evaluation as evidence difficult. As for his ability to read, the clearest clue in the canonical gospels is in the passage of Luke 4.16-19, when he is given a manuscript scroll of Isaiah, and as for his ability to write, the clue is in the passage John 8.06 and 08, in a very well-known passage, the Pericope of the Adulterous Woman (John 7.53-8.11), pointed out by researchers as one of the most extensive interpolations in the Gospels,[5] along with Mark 16.09-20.[6] In Luke 4.16-9, Jesus reads a passage from Isaiah 61.01-2, the reading is done in verses Luke 4.18-9, but with divergences in both texts, that is, Jesus' reading does not exactly coincide with Isaiah's text, his reading seems more like a paraphrase, therefore these examples are not proof of Jesus' literacy, only clues without clear confirmation, as we will show below. For John P. Meier, “all three passages (John 7:15, John 8:06, and

5 Since the episode does not appear in the oldest and best manuscripts.

6 It also does not appear in the oldest manuscripts, so researchers point out that Mark's text originally ended at 16:08.

Luke 16:30) are involved in problems of interpretation and historicity" (MEIER, 1991, vol. 1, 268).[7]

II.03. Supposedly Reading

Luke 4.18-9

Greek text (NA27)

18 πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ᾽ ἐμέ, οὗ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι
πτωχοῖς, ἀπέσταλκέν με κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς
ἀνάβλεψιν, ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει,
19 κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν.
Latin text (Vulgate)
18 Spiritus Domini super me, propter quod unxit me, evangelizare pauperibus misit me, sanare contritos corde,
19 prædicare captivis remissionem, et cæcis visum, dimittere confractos in remissionem, prædicare annum Domini acceptum et diem retributionis.

Translation (NRSVUE, 2021)
18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to free the oppressed,
19 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Compare Isaiah 61:01-2
Hebrew text (Tanakh)
1 רֽוּחַ אֲדֹנָ֥י יְהוִ֖ה עָלָ֑י יַ֗עַן מָשַׁ֨ח יְהוָ֤ה אֹתִי֙ לְבַשֵּׂ֣ר עֲנָוִ֔ים שְׁלָחַ֖נִי לַחֲבֹ֣שׁ לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי־לֵ֑ב
לִקְרֹ֤א לִשְׁבוּיִם֙ דְּרֹ֔ור וְלַאֲסוּרִ֖ים פְּקַח־קֹֽוחַ׃

7 Translation issues may also be included.

לִקְרֹא שְׁנַת־רָצוֹן לַיהוָה וְיוֹם נָקָם לֵאלֹהֵינוּ לְנַחֵם כָּל־אֲבֵלִים׃ 2

Septuagint Greek text
1 πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπι πτωχοῖς ἀπέσταλκέν με ἰάσασθαι τοὺς συντετριμμένους τῇ καρδίᾳ κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν
2 καλέσαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτὸν καὶ ἡμέραν ἀνταποδόσεως παρακαλέσαι πάντας τοὺς πενθοῦντας

Latin text (Vulgate)
1 Spiritus Domini super me,
and the quod unxerit Dominus me;
ad annuntiandum mansuetis misit me,
ut mederer contritis corde,
et prædicarem captivis indulgentiam,
et clausis apertionem;
2 ut prædicarem annum plaquebilem Domino,
et diem ultionis Deo nostro;
ut consolarer omnes lugentes,

Translation (NRSVUE, 2021 and JPS, 2000)
1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives.
and release to the prisoners,
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn.

Note that the texts coincide only in the first few phrases, so that from the phrase "and recovery of sight to the blind" (Greek: καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν; Latin: et cæcis visum), read by Jesus, Jesus' reading begins to diverge from the text of Isaiah 61:1-2. From then on, some phrases from Jesus' reading do not appear in Isaiah, and

vice versa. For example, the phrase above in Jesus' reading "and recovery of sight to the blind" (Greek: καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν; Latin: et cæcis visum) does not appear in Isaiah's text, as well as some phrases in Isaiah's text are omitted in Jesus' reading, the strange phrase: "and the day of vengeance of our God" (Hebrew: yôm nâqâm; Greek: ἀνταποδόσεως; Latin: et diem ultionis Deo nostro) is noteworthy, as well as the final phrase is not read by Jesus: "to comfort those who mourn." (Greek: πάντας τοὺς πενθοῦντας; Latin: ut consolarer omnes lugentes). These problems leave doubts about Jesus' degree of literacy, that is, whether he was literate, illiterate, partially literate, or functionally illiterate. Also, on the other hand, the Greek and Latin translations do not strictly coincide with the Hebrew text.

Furthermore, Jesus read only two verses; the full text of Isaiah extends to verse eleven (Isaiah 61:1-11). Perhaps he read just enough to inform his listeners that "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). In other words, he chose to read only the opening passage. The scroll of Isaiah's text, which Jesus allegedly read, was given to him by a synagogue attendant: "He (Jesus) unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written" (Luke 4:17). For such a task, one must know how to read. However, the point is that in ancient traditions, it was common, and still is in some traditions, for adherents to know the scriptures by heart, precisely because many were illiterate and thus memorized the texts, thus transmitting them orally to their disciples or descendants. For example, in India, even today it is possible to find Hindu reciters who know the complete text of the Bhagavad Gītā by heart (700 double verses – shlokas). Therefore, even an illiterate person is capable of memorizing and reciting a sacred text by heart. In the case of Jesus, due to a lack of data on this passage, it is impossible to know whether he actually read it or whether he already knew the passage by heart and simply recited it, already knowing it was a text from Isaiah. It is also impossible to know whether the manuscript was in Aramaic, Hebrew, or Greek. In short, it is not possible to draw

certainty from this passage about his literacy, only a hypothesis, given other hypotheses to the contrary.

I.04. Supposedly Writing

The passage where Jesus writes appears in the Gospel of John 8:6 and 8, in an episode that became well-known as the Pericope of the Adulteress,[8] especially because of Jesus' famous phrase, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." The passages are the following: 8.06 ὁ δὲ ἰησοῦς κάτω κύψας τῶ δακτύλῳ κατέγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν (Jesus leaned down and wrote with his finger on the ground.) and 8.08 καὶ πάλιν κατακύψας ἔγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν. (And once again, he bent down and wrote on the floor.) Well, the first and crucial fact to be observed here is the polysemy of the Greek verb ἔγραφεν (egrafen or ἔγραφε egrafe – wrote), third person past tense of the verb γράφω (grafo), which has many meanings in Greek: to scratch, to cut, to draw, to scribble, to paint, to write or to propose a law (A Greek-English Lexicon, Liddell and Scott, 1940 and BEEKES, 2010: 285-6). Greek verbs derived from γράφω (grafo): ἐγγράφω – engrafo (to mark, paint, inscribe, record, write); ἀναγράφω – anagrafo (to carve, record, describe, inscribe); εἰσγράφω – eisgrafo (to write, to inscribe). In Latin, the following words of Greek origin exist: graphicē (art of drawing or painting); graphis (drawing, line, plan), and graphĭum (writing style, stylus). The Vulgate translates ἔγραφεν (egrafen) as “scrībēbat” (wrote), the third-person past tense of the verb scrībō, which, in addition to meaning to write, also means: to draw, to trace lines, letters, or figures, to engrave, to mark, to mark with an imprint, to describe (LEWIS and SHORT, 1879; SIMPSON, 1960: 267 and 539 and TORRINHA, 1937: 367 and 777). Therefore, because of polysemy, it is not possible to know precisely what Jesus did when he bent down, he may have written, drawn, scribbled, scratched or marked, so this

8 Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Plese assessed this episode as “apocryphal history” (EHRMAN and PLESE, 2011: 413).

passage is not indisputable proof of his literacy, just a possibility, added to the aggravating factor that this passage (Pericope of the Adulteress) is proven to be a late interpolation (for details on the interpolation, see: BOTELHO, 2025) In 8.06, some editions replace the word κατέγραφεν (kategrafen – wrote leaning downwards), with the simple ἔγραφεν (egrafen – wrote), other manuscripts complement it with the phrase “the sins of all the accusers”, John P. Meier suggested that he could have written “the judicial decision that he (Jesus) would issue”, or “the relevant biblical texts such as Jeremiah 17.13 or Exodus 23:1”. Even if it is true that Jesus wrote on the ground, Meier argued: “In any case, even the scribble of a few words on the ground would not tell us much about Jesus’ level of literacy” (MEIER, 1991: vol. I, 269).

II.05. Different Meanings of the Verb "katagrafo"

II.05.01. In the Different Meaning of "Write"

Also, the verb "to write" does not always mean to write alphabetical letters, as someone can write numerals, ideograms, hieroglyphs, logograms, cuneiform signs, cryptograms, shorthand, and codes. John P. Meier suggested, citing another author, that a "much simpler possibility is that Jesus was drawing lines on the ground to show his disinterest in the case or his disgust with the excessive zeal of his accusers" (MEIER, 1991, vol. 1, 269), but this explanation is also a supposition. Some functional illiterates, depending on their profession, cannot read or write, but can perform some mathematical operations, thus being able to write numbers. As already mentioned, illiteracy has varying degrees. The Greek historian and geographer Herodotus (485 BCE - 425 BCE) used the verb καταγράφω - katagrafo in a different sense than writing: “This is the reason for it: when the young one begins to move in the mother, its claws, much sharper than those of any other creature, tear the womb, and as it grows, it scratches and tears much more

(καταγράφων - katagráfon), so that when the time of birth approaches, there is rarely any part of the womb left whole" (Herodotus, Histories, 3.108.04 – KEITH, 2009a: 30), therefore in the sense of scratching and tearing. Closer to the time of Jesus, the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (90 BCE - 30 BCE) used the verb καταγράφω (katagrafo) in the sense of "to enlist in the army", he stated in his work Library of History 13.02.02 that, "in military zeal, some Romans in Athens went voluntarily to the generals and insisted that they be enlisted (καταγρειν - katagrein) among the soldiers". In another passage of the same work (13.04.01) he stated: "Hermocrates, Sicanus, and Hercleides enlisted (καταγραφων - katagrafon) soldiers...", and in a third passage (13.54.01) he used the verse in the same sense: "Hannibal... assembled both the mercenaries he had collected from the Iberian Peninsula and the soldiers he had enlisted (καταγραντας) from Libya". And in a fourth passage (13.70.01): "As soon as Lysander took command, he enlisted (κατγραφε) a suitable number of soldiers from the Peloponnese". In a sense relatively close to the previous one, the Greek historian and geographer Strabo (or Strabo – 63 BCE – 24 CE) wrote in Geography 14.01.21: "There was a Senate that was recruited (καταγραφομένη - katagrafoméne)".

II.05.02. In the Sense of Writing

Plutarch (46 CE – 120 CE), a contemporary of the Gospel authors, used the verb καταγράφω (katagrafo) twice in his Parallel Lives to mean writing. Mentioning Solon, he observed: "All his laws would be in force for a hundred years and were written (κατεγραφησαν - kategrafesan) on 'axons,' or wooden tablets, which rotated with the oblong frames that held them" (Solon, 21.01). In another passage he used this verb in a similar sense: "they wrote (καταγραφουσιν - katagrafousin) what they desired on the parchment" (Lisander, 19.06). These examples from Plutarch's Parallel Lives are examples of the fact that in some cases in the first

century, καταγράφω (katagrafo) undoubtedly referred to literate writing.

II.05.03. In the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus Collection

This collection of manuscripts was discovered in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by papyrologists and editors Bernard Pyne Grenfell and Arthur Surridge Hunt in an ancient rubbish dump near Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. The manuscripts date from the third century BCE to the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 640 CE. Almost all are in papyrus form, most in Greek, and some in Egyptian, Latin, and Arabic. A very few in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Pahlavi have also been found. Publication began in 1898 by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, and since then, more than five thousand documents have been discovered, all of which were stored in boxes of papyrus fragments. They were published in a series, The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, which continues to this day. The latest publication was volume LXXXVII in August 2023, by other publishers. However, researchers estimate that this published quantity represents only 1% to 2% of the remaining manuscripts yet to be discovered. The quantity is numerous, but almost all are severely damaged; some have only a few sentences remaining, filling less than half a page. For convenience, the names of the papyri are abbreviated with the acronym P.Oxy, e.g., P.Oxy 268, P.Oxy 242, P.Oxy 328, etc. Most are non-literary texts, including law codes, edicts, records, official correspondence, petitions, court records, sales, loans, wills, decrees, accounting records, inventories, horoscopes, and private letters. Only 10% are literary texts, including fragments of the Old and New Testaments. For example, in the manuscript P.Oxy 02 (𝔓1 in the Nestlé-Aland nomenclature), only the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew was found. In the manuscript P.Oxy 03 (069 in the Nestlé-Aland nomenclature) fragments of only Mark 10.50-1 and 11.11-2 were found (GRENFELL and HUNT, 1898: part. I, 04-8) and in the manuscript P.Oxy 208 (𝔓5 Nestlé-Aland) only fragments of chapters

1, 16 and 20 of the Gospel of John were found (GRENFELL and HUNT, 1898: part. II, 01-8). The papyrus P.Oxy 209 (𝔓10 Nestlé-Aland) only the first seven verses of the first chapter of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Idem, part. II: 08-9) and many others. In short, the number of finds is large, but almost all of them are very damaged. Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Plese published the Greek texts and translated into English the following papyri of apocryphal texts: P.Oxy 210, P.Oxy 840, P.Oxy 1224, P.Oxy 2949 and P.Oxy 4009, all so fragmented that it is not possible to identify whether they correspond to any apocrypha already discovered (EHRMAN and PLESE, 2011: 259-93; see also: ELLIOTT, 2005: 31-5 and OTERO, 1956: 81-8). As for the verb καταγράφω - katagrafo, this collection is a rich mine of information on the meanings of this verb, since it appears many times in the manuscripts and, for the study here, especially those more contemporary to the composers of the Gospels (1st and 2nd centuries CE). The manuscript P.Oxy 268, dated 58 CE, deals with the repayment of a dowry, which includes a clause written in the left margin of the papyrus. At the end of the second line of the clause, the phrase γεγνυα καταγραφη - gegonuia katagrafe (being written, being recorded) appears, that is, in this text the verb καταγράφω (katagrafo) means “to record in writing” (GRENFELL and HUNT, 1898: part. II, 249 and KEITH, 2009a: 34). Therefore, a meaning very close to that intended by the interpolator of the passage in John 8:06 and 8).

P. Oxy 327 (late 1st century CE) and P. Oxy 328 (85 CE) confirm the meaning of καταγράφω (katagrafo) as “to record a transaction.” P.Oxy 327 is a notice to an agoramonus (manager) to register (καταγράφειν - katagrafein) the sale of the half-share of a slave, named Dionysus, about thirty years of age, and P.Oxy 328 is the beginning and a notice to the agoramonus (manager) of Theom, son of Serapion, to register (καταγράφειν - katagrafein) a sale. Therefore, from P.Oxy 329 (end of the first century CE) to P.Oxy 340 (98-9 CE) are notices of requests for the recording of transactions

(GRENFELL and HUNT, 1898: part. II, 307-8 and for further information, see: KEITH, 2009a: 33-7).

II.05.04. In Flavius Josephus

The verb καταγράφω - katagrafo appears in two works by Flavius Josephus, in Antiquities of the Jews VI.66 and in Wars of the Jews V.214. In the first passage, the verb means "to write": "The prophet, having written down (καταγραψας - katagrapsas) for them all that was to come..." (Jewish Antiquities, VI.66 – THACKERAY, 1950: vol. V, 198 and 199 and KEITH, 2009a: 38). In The Jewish War, V.214, the verb appears in a different sense than the previous one and from that in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri: "On this tapestry was depicted (κατεγέγραπτο - kategégrapto) a panorama of the heavens, except the signs of the Zodiac" (The Jewish War, V.214 – THACKERAY, 1957: vol. III, 264 and 265). While in the first passage the meaning is "to write," in the second passage the meaning is "to portray."

II.05.05. In the Septuagint

The verb katagrafo appears eleven times in the Greek Old Testament, in meanings that do not always coincide: Exodus 17:14 and 32:15; Numbers 11:26; 1 Chronicles 9:01; 2 Chronicles 20:34; 1 Ezra 2:12; Job 13:26; Sirach 48:10; Horea 8:12; and Maccabees 9:22 and 14:26. In Exodus 17:14, the Lord commanded Moses: “Write (κατάγραψον – katagrapson) this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua…” Moses is asked to write, but the command also carries a sense of recording, something like “write this for the record.” Katagrapson (write) is the translation of the Hebrew verb כתב (katav), to write, to register, to enroll, to engrave (Blue Letter Bible – BLB). This is one of eight passages in the Septuagint where the Greek verb καταγράφω (katagrafo) is the translation of the Hebrew verb כתב (katav). In Exodus 32.15: “Moses

returned and came down from the mountain carrying two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, and the tablets were written (καταγεγραμμέναι – katagegramménai) on both sides, written (γεγραμμέναι – gegramménai) on the front and on the back" (NRSVUE, 2021). Chris Keith noted that this passage "is the Septuagint's most important use of the Greek verb καταγράφω (katagrafo) for the proper understanding of John 8:06 and 08..." (KEITH, 2009a: 39). Once again, the verb καταγεγραμμέναι (katagegramménai) is the translation of the Hebrew verb כתב (katav). Note that in the following sentence, the verb γράφω (grafo) is used without the prefix κατα (kata), that is, γεγραμμέναι (gegramménai), just as in John 8:06 and 8:08, as if they were synonymous. Finally, in both passages, Exodus 17:14 and 32:15, καταγράφω (kagtagrafo) appears in the sense of literate writing.

In Numbers 11:26, the meaning resembles that of Diodorus Siculus, in which the verb καταγράφω (katagráfo) appears in the sense of formal record: "Two men remained in the camp (...), they were among those registered (καταγεγραμμένων - katagegramménon), but they had not left the tent, so they prophesied in the camp" (NRSVUE – 2021). This form of inscription, registration or enlistment primarily describes an extra-literary act, and not specifically a literary practice, as both men were registered on the list, but it does not mean that they were literate.

Interestingly, in 2 Chronicles 30:34, the verb katagrafo appears in these two different senses above (to write and to record) in the same verse: "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, from first to last, are they written (γεγραμμένοι - gegramménoi) in the Annals of Jehu the son of Hanani, which are recorded (κατέγραψεν - katégrapsen) in the Book of the Kings of Israel" (NSRVUE – 2021). In the first mention, γεγραμμένοι - gegramménoi (written) is the translation of the Hebrew verb כתב (katav), to write, while in the second, κατέγραψεν - katégrapsen (recorded) is the translation of another Hebrew verb, עלה (ala), whose translation is problematic due to extensive polysemy. In the other passages, 1 Chronicles 9:01; 1

Ezra 2:12; Job 13:26; Ecclesiastes 48:10; Hosea 8:14; 1 Maccabees 9:2 and 14:26, katagrafo appears in the sense of literate writing

II.06. The Verb γράφω (grapho) in the New Testament

According to Chris Keith, this verb appears 191 times in the New Testament, always in the sense of "it is written," "it is written by Moses," or "it is written in the Law and the Prophets." Here are some examples: "But Jesus said to them, 'Because of the hardness of your hearts, he wrote (ἔγραψεν – egrapsen) this commandment for you'" (Mark 10:05 – NRSVUE, 2021). "And they asked him, 'Teacher, Moses wrote (ἔγραψεν – egrapsen) for us that..." (Luke 20:28 – NRSVUE, 2021). "And he said to them, 'These are the words I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which are written (γεγραμμένα – gegramména) in the Law and the Prophets..." (Luke, 24.44 – NRSVUE, 2021). "I do not write (γράφω – grafo) these things to shame you..." (1 Corinthians 4.14 – NRSVUE, 2021). And, "Now the things I write (γράφω – grafo) to you..." (Galatians, 1.20 – NRSVUE, 2021).

Finally, except in the interpolated passage of John 8:6, the verb καταγράφω (kagtagrafo), present in passages of the Septuagint, does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament, only the verb (γράφω – grafo) in the sense of writing, since the interpolator of the Pericope of the Adulteress (John 7:53-8:11) understands that both verbs are synonymous. Therefore, based on the references in the Septuagint and in other passages of the New Testament, it is clear that the interpolator of the Pericope of the Adulteress intended to use these verbs in the sense of writing and thereby show Jesus as someone literate, perhaps with the intention of putting an end to a discussion about Jesus' literacy that was prevalent in his time. Chris Keith agreed, arguing that, even if the verb γράφω (grafo) does not exclusively mean to write, the interpolator of the passage from the Pericope of the Adulteress probably intended to interpolate in the sense of writing, thereby

ensuring that Jesus was literate (KEITH, 2009a: 30), in an attempt to end the doubt about Jesus' literacy.

II.07. Jesus Amazed by His Knowledge

Another passage, but with a much more indirect and shorter reference, occurs in John 7:15: “The Jews were amazed at this, saying, ‘How does this man know literature (γράμματα – grámmata), when he has never been taught?’” The noun γράμματα – grámmata is the plural of γράμμα – grámma, which means: printed letter or symbol, engraving, drawing, writing; therefore, γράμματα – grámmata can mean: letters, literature, alphabet. For example: the question: Ξέρεις γράμματα (xéreis grámmata) means “do you know literature”? or “do you know how to read”? Noun derived from the Greek verb: γράφω - grafo (I write, I draw, I scratch, I scribble), infinitive: γρᾰ́φειν - gráfein (to write, scratch, draw, etc.). Therefore, this passage leaves the question of whether the Jews were surprised by Jesus' literacy, or not only by that, but also by his ability to know the scriptures and argue theologically. Since the Greek plural noun "grámmata" can mean both "letters" and "literature," it is not possible to know precisely whether the Jews were impressed by Jesus' literacy, or by his argumentative ability and in-depth knowledge of the scriptures, which represents a level of literacy beyond the mere ability to read. As mentioned previously, in the past, due to limited access to formal education, especially in rural areas, the practice of memorizing sacred texts was common. A current practical example is that it is possible to find videos on the web of Hindu children reciting the entire Bhagavad Gita. However, this ability does not mean that these children are erudite; some viewers may even be impressed, as they may be reciting without even knowing the full meaning of everything they recite. It is also possible to find Christian children preaching and sermonizing at church altars, imitating the practice of their father, who is a pastor. Children generally have excellent memories. Therefore, it is not impossible that, in the past, an adult

with a good memory could be a teacher and teach others, [9]especially in rural areas where literacy rates were very low, at a time when oral transmission was often more common than written transmission. Memorization is not the same as erudition. Therefore, this passage leaves the question of whether Jesus was illiterate and knew the scriptures only by heart, or someone only reasonably literate who could read and write but was unable to discuss them, or a scholar who was able, by virtue of his immense knowledge, to even comment on the scriptures and discuss theology.

9 On the farm where I live, I had a personal experience relatively close to the circumstances above, as for many years I lived next door to an illiterate man whose knowledge of plants was impressively extensive, both theoretical and practical, and he was able to teach me about the subject. Furthermore, when I lived in India, I encountered devotees who knew Hindu scriptures by heart. I even heard of a blind pandit who knew dozens of texts by heart.

Part Three

III.01. The Literacy of Jesus in the Apocryphal Texts

The reader may be asking: if the apocryphal texts are not recognized as authentic accounts, and therefore not recognized as reliable by Christians in general, and therefore not included in the Bible, why reproduce them here? The answer is that the recognition of one text and the rejection of others is a matter of ideological, theological, and political approval, as well as of canonization according to the sectarian current, therefore a choice regarding the period of canonization of a religious message preached by someone considered a visionary. Canonical diversification does not occur only in Christianity; it is a common occurrence in almost all religions. Each sectarian current believes that its texts are the originals and those of others are adulterations. The canonization of texts is crucial in the subsequent formation of exegesis and theology, because the texts chosen will be interpreted in accordance with their interpretation.

The argument is that canonical texts are more historical than apocryphal texts, and therefore more faithfully reproduce the life and sayings of Jesus, since they were composed first (70 to 110 CE), while the apocrypha was composed later (from the second century CE onward). This is currently a nearly unanimous understanding in historical research on Christianity. However, it is important to consider that both canonical and apocryphal texts were composed from oral accounts, before written composition. Therefore, we are uncertain what was omitted and what was added at the time of written composition. That is, what the canonical compositions omitted or added, and what the apocrypha omitted or added, in relation to the oral tradition of the time. For example, the more extensive accounts of Jesus' literacy in the apocryphal texts, which belonged to the oral tradition, are either myths added for illustration or to fill in

gaps in the canonical texts. Or, conversely, the shorter accounts in the canonical gospels are omissions from suspect oral traditions, current at the time, or whether these traditions did not even exist and were invented later, during the later composition of the apocrypha. It is not possible to draw a conclusion from this question, only the most likely hypotheses, or, at most, near certainties.

From the surviving works, it is possible to identify that, in antiquity, the main rival current to the emerging mainstream was Gnosticism, primarily due to the discomfort of heregiologists (Irenaeus, Origen, etc.) with this Christian interpretation at the beginning of Christianity. We know that, in the first centuries, there was no canonical uniformity, that is, each community followed different texts, until the beginning of the attempt at unification in the fourth century CE. Furthermore, we know throughout history that there were texts that were included and then excluded, as well as some that were only included later. Consequently, the Bibles are not strictly identical. However, for historians, apocryphal texts are treasure troves of information about the early stages of Christianity, as it is clear that the diversity of interpretations, canons, and currents was much greater than previously known, especially the relatively well-preserved collection known as the Nag Hammadi Library, found in 1945 in Egypt, which is largely composed of Gnostic texts. Among all the apocryphal texts found to date, the most widely read and well-known is the Gospel of Thomas, a collection of 114 proverbs spoken by Jesus. The content of these texts leads those who read it for the first time to wonder why this gospel was not included among the canonical, given the wisdom of Jesus' sayings, such as the passage (§ 03), likely with an Eastern influence: "Jesus said: 'If your rulers say to you, "Look, the kingdom is in heaven," then the birds of the air will precede you.'" If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. But the kingdom is within you, and it is outside of you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known and understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know

yourselves, then you are in poverty, and it is you who are the poverty" (EHRMAN, 2011: 311).

III.02. In the Apocryphal Gospels

While references to Jesus' literacy are few and dubious in the canonical gospels, by far the most extensive accounts appear in the apocrypha, through fanciful and miraculous tales, some passages even comical. The most extensive narrative is in the Gospel of the Infancy of Thomas, paragraphs 6-8 and 14-15. In passage 6.03, the boy Jesus calls his first teacher a "hypocrite." The second teacher struck him on the head, which the boy Jesus cursed, and the third treated him well. Jesus, pleased, lifted the curse from the previous teacher. The boy Jesus was taken to learn to read and write with three teachers. The first teacher was a disaster, as Jesus already knew the alphabet better than this teacher, Zacchaeus, even before the lessons began. This is the text with the most extensive account of the literacy of the infant Jesus in the Gospels, both canonical and apocryphal.

III.03. The Infancy Gospels of Jesus

The number of gospels in the early years of Christianity was so great that they could even be classified into genres. Historians do not provide consistent numbers, but it is estimated that at least fifty gospels existed at the time of the Council of Nicaea (325 CE). Currently, whether complete manuscripts or fragments are considered, more than thirty have been discovered. Among these many genres, one is the Infancy Gospels of Jesus. These were never canonized, and over time, they fell into oblivion, and were also burned by the Church in the Middle Ages. Thus, many today, Christians or atheists, are unaware that these apocryphal texts exist. Given the number of surviving manuscripts, these texts must have

enjoyed some popularity in regions where orthodox persecution was less.

It seems that the primary intention in composing the Infancy Gospels was to demonstrate Jesus' early knowledge of his supernatural origins and his power over life and death. Another objective may also have been to fill the perceived omission in orthodox texts regarding information about Jesus' childhood. Except for the passage in Luke 2:41-50, the Canonical Gospels are almost silent on the early years of his life.

The modern Christian reader will be shocked by these accounts, while the skeptic will delight in the humor of the events. However, it must be taken into account that Christian texts and Christianity in the early centuries were very different from what we have today, after many centuries of exclusively reading canonical texts. Thus, it is important to remember that in the early centuries, there was no textual uniformity in the Gospel accounts; different churches used different texts, until a prevailing current gradually consolidated, victorious in the first councils, which unified the texts and approved the canon. Therefore, the diversity of oral accounts and texts was enormous, so Christians of that time should not have been shocked by these narratives, which to us today seem ridiculous and comical.

In fact, among the gospel genres, those about childhood are the most laughable. Some passages even seem like episodes from a comedy film. I confess that, when I read these texts for the first time, in the early 1980s, I could not help but laugh, especially at the episode of the miracle of the lengthening of the board during the making of a bed, to help Joseph, Jesus' father, a careless carpenter. The surviving Infancy Gospels of Jesus are:

- Infancy Gospel of Thomas (EHRMAN, 2011: 3-29; ELLIOTT, 2005: 68-83; SCHNEEMELCHER, 2003, Vol. I, 439-51 and OTERO, 1956: 299-324)
- Arabic Infancy Gospel (OTERO, 1956: 326-57 and summary in ELLIOTT, 2005: 100-8)

- Book of the Infancy of the Savior (OTERO, 1956: 275-92 and 387-93)
- Armenian Infancy Gospel (OTERO, 1956: 379-86)
- Protevagelium of James (SCHNEEMELCHER, 2002: vol. I, 421-39; EHRMAN, 2011: 31-71 and OTERRO, 1956: 135-88)
- Story of Joseph the Carpenter (OTERO, 1956: 358-78; ELLIOTT, 2005: 111-7 and EHRMAN, 2011: 358-78)
- Latin Infancy Gospels - Arundel form (EHRMAN, 2011: 115-55)
- Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (OTERO, 1956: 189-257 and EHRMAN, 2001: 73-113)

Many episodes recur in different passages in the infancy gospels; the Infancy Gospel of Thomas appears to be the oldest, and the others may have been composed from it. The Arabic Infancy Gospel is the longest. They all deal with the life of Jesus from the ages of five to twelve, ending with the episode of Jesus in the temple, narrated in Luke 2:41-50. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas begins the narrative where the Protoevangelium of James ends, so it can be considered a continuation.

III.04. The Cruel Acts of Jesus as a Child

In these apocryphal infancy gospel accounts, Jesus also performs some cruel miracles, inflicting bodily harm and murdering children and adults for futile reasons. Consider some of them below. In the Infancy Gospel of Thomas III:1-3, it is reported that “The son of Annas, the scribe, was there with Joseph. He took a willow branch and scattered the water Jesus had drawn. (2) Jesus, angered by this, said to him, “You unjust and irreverent man! What harm have the pools of water done to you? See, now you too will wither like a tree, and will never again bear leaves, roots, or fruit.” 1 (3) Immediately the child dried up completely. Jesus went out and returned to Joseph’s house. But the parents of the dried-up child took him away, lamenting his lost youth. They took him to Joseph and

began to accuse him: “What kind of son do you have, that you do such things?” (EHRMAN, 2011: 11 and ELLIOTT, 2006: 135-6).

Then, in this same Gospel IV.1-02, an episode that is repeated in the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, chap. XLVII” .... (01) he (Jesus) was passing through the village, when a child ran up and struck him on the shoulder. Jesus became angry and said to him: "You will go no further on your way." Immediately the child fell down and died. (...). (2) The parents of the dead child went to Joseph and blamed him, saying: "Since you have such a son, you cannot live with us in the village. Or teach him to bless and not to curse, for he is killing our children!" (EHRMAN, 2011: 13; ELLIOTT, 2006: 140-1 and OTERO, 1956: 354). And the cruelty does not end here, later on, in chapter V.01, “Joseph called the child (Jesus) and warned him privately: "Why are you doing these things? These people are suffering, they hate us and persecute us!" But Jesus answered: "I know that these are not your words; nevertheless, I also will be silent for your sake. But those others will bear their own wrath.” And immediately those who accused him were struck blind” (EHRMAN, 2011: 13 and ELLIOTT, 2006: 140-1).

And furthermore, in another passage from the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, chapter XLVI, Jesus was playing on a Sabbath day with other children by the riverbank, where they had made clay birds. Upon seeing this, the son of a Jew, for it is forbidden to do such things on this holy day of the Jews, warned them and began to destroy what had been made. When Jesus stretched out his hands toward the clay birds he had made, they flew away singing. When the Jew’s son approached the puddle that Jesus had dug to destroy it, it dried up, and Jesus said to him: “See how this water has dried up; so will it be with your life.” And the child withered away (ELLIOTTT, 2006: 138 and OTERRO, 1956: 354). This miracle is narrated in the Infancy Gospel by Thomas the Israelite, chapter II, but with the omission of the murder of the child who withered away.

These cruel acts reported above, present in the Infancy Gospels, are not so absurd when compared with the miracles of the

Canonical Gospels. However, not even these latter texts were absolutely free of a cruel act. See Jesus' curse and environmental assault in Matthew 21:18-20 (also, Mark 11:12-14 and 20-26), "In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went to it and found nothing on it but leaves. He said to it, 'May no fruit grow on you ever again.' And immediately the fig tree withered away" (NRSVUE, 2021).

III.05. Bath Water and Miraculous Diapers

According to the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, Jesus' bath water, as a baby, was miraculous and performed healings. It cured a young leper (section XVII – OTERO, 1956: 336), a leper boy, the son of a prince's wife (section XVIII. 1-03 – OTERO, 1956: 337-8), the spell of a young man who was transformed into a mule (XX and XXI – Idem: 338-9), two children struck by a plague in Bethlehem (XXVII and XXVIII – Idem: 342-3), and other healing miracles.

Jesus' diapers also performed miracles and killed rivals. In a passage from the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, section XI, a child was cured by contact with Jesus's diapers (OTERO, 1956: 333-4). In a later passage, XXXIII, of the same gospel, a young girl was tormented by Satan, who appeared to her in the form of a dragon. The family lived in deep sadness. His mother, upon learning of the cures of the child Jesus, went to Bethlehem to meet Mary, who gave her some water from Jesus' bath to pour over the body of the possessed woman. Then she gave her the swaddling clothes in which the child Jesus was wrapped. Then his mother returned to her city, and when the time came for Satan to torment her in the form of a dragon, the young girl placed the swaddling clothes on his head and unfolded them, and suddenly, flames came out of them and directed them towards the dragon's head and eyes. With that, Satan fled in terror, abandoning the young woman, and never appeared again (OTERO, 1956: 346-7).

III.06. The Most Comical Miracles

Next, a selection of the most hilarious miracles from Jesus' childhood is presented, drawn primarily from the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

– Jesus speaks in the crib as a baby: In chronological order, Jesus' first miracle occurred when he was just born, still a baby in the crib, when he said to his mother, "I, who was born of you, am Jesus, the Son of God, the Word, as the angel Gabriel announced to you, and my Father sent me for the salvation of the world" (Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, section I – OTERO, 1956: 328). This miracle is also mentioned in the Quran (XIX, 30-3), but with different wording: "I am a servant of Allah (inni abdul lahi). He has given me the Scripture; He has made me a prophet; He has made me blessed wherever I am. He has commanded me to pray, to give alms while I live, to care for my mother. He has not made me domineering nor disgraceful. Peace was with me on the day I was born, and it will be with me on the day I die, and on the day I am raised to life." Note the care taken by the Quran's composer to specify that Jesus is "a servant of Allah" rather than "the Son of God," since Muslims admit that Jesus (Isa) was a prophet of Allah, but not the Son of God. In Islamic theology, God has no son.

– Measurement of boards was not a problem: Jesus' father was a carpenter and used to make plows and yokes. He received a request from a rich man to make a bed. But when the length of one of the crossbeams became too short, he did not know what to do. The boy Jesus said to his father, "Place the two pieces of wood on the ground and align them from the middle to the end." Joseph did as the child said. Then Jesus stood at the other end, took the shorter plank, and stretched it until it reached the same length as the other (Gospel of the Infancy of Thomas, chap. 13; EHRMAN, 2011: 19). This miracle is also reproduced in the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, chap. XXXVIII, with a shorter version (OTERO, 1956: 349).

– The clay statues: When Jesus was seven years old, he was

playing one day with other children his age. For fun, they made clay images of animals, such as wolves, donkeys, and birds, and each praised his own work, striving to be better than that of his companions. Then Jesus said to the other children, "I will command the clay statues I made to walk, and they will walk." Then Jesus commanded the statues to walk, and they immediately walked. When he commanded them to return, they returned. He had made statues of birds that flew when he commanded them to fly and stopped when he told them to stop, and when he gave them food and drink, they drank and ate. (Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, chap. XXXVI; OTERO, 1956: 348)

– Jesus, the Dyer and Fortuneteller: One day, while playing and running with other children, Jesus passed by the shop of a dyer named Salem. In this shop were cloth belonging to a large number of the townspeople, which Salem was preparing to dye in various colors. Jesus entered the shop, took all the cloth and threw it into the cauldron. Salem was terrified and said, "What have you done, O son of Mary? You have harmed me and my customers." Then Jesus replied, "Any cloth that you want to change color, I will change." And he took the cloths from the kettle, and each one was dyed the color the dyer desired (Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, chap. XXXVII; OTERO, 1956: 348-9).

– The explosion of the snake: Joseph sent his son James to gather firewood and bring it home. Jesus accompanied him. While James was gathering the wood, a snake bit his hand. As he lay on the ground to die, Jesus appeared and blew on the bite site. The pain immediately subsided, the snake exploded, and James recovered his health (Gospel of the Infancy of Thomas, chap. 16; EHRMAN, 2011: 21).

– Jesus resurrects a boy to exonerate himself: Jesus was playing on the roof of a house, and one of the children he was playing with fell from the roof and died. When the other children saw what had happened, they ran away, leaving Jesus alone. When the parents of the boy who fell arrived, they accused Jesus. But Jesus said, “I did

not push you.” But they began to accuse him publicly. Then Jesus went to the place of the injured boy and shouted in a loud voice, “Zenon (that was the boy’s name), stand up and tell me, did I push you?” The boy immediately stood up and said, “No, you did not push me, but you raised me up.” When the others saw this, they were amazed (Gospel of the Infancy of Thomas, chap. 9; EHRMAN, 2011: 17).

– Miracle to make up for an oversight: When Jesus was six years, his mother gave him a jar to draw water for his house. But he stumbled in the crowd and the jar broke. Then Jesus opened the mantle he was wearing and filled it with water, carrying the water to his mother (Gospel of the Infancy of Thomas, chap. 11; EHRMAN, 2011: 17).

– The improvident carpenter Joseph is rescued once again by Jesus: One day the king of Jerusalem sent for him and said, "Joseph, I want you to make me a throne like the one where I usually sit." Joseph obeyed, and setting to work, he spent two years in the palace building the throne. And when it was in place, they noticed that on each side it was two spans short of the prescribed measurement. Then the king became angry with Joseph, who, fearing the monarch's anger, could not eat and lay down fasting. Then Jesus asked him why he was afraid, and he replied, "The work I have labored for two years is lost." Jesus answered, "Do not be afraid or discouraged. Take this side of the throne, and I will take the other, so that we can measure it exactly." Joseph did as Jesus had asked, and each pulled to one side, and the throne obeyed and became exactly the desired size (Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, chap. XXXIX; OTERO, 1956: 349-50).

III.07. The Literacy of Jesus According to the Apocryphal Gospels

III.07.01. In the Gospel of the Infancy of Thomas 6-8 and 14-15

The First Teacher of the Child Jesus

6

(1) Standing nearby was a teacher named Zacchaeus, who heard Jesus say these things to his father. He was greatly astonished that he was saying such things, even though he was only a child. (2) After a few days, he approached Joseph and said to him, “You have a bright and good-minded son. Come, give him to me so he can learn his letters, and along with the letters I will teach him all knowledge, including how to greet all elders and honor them as your ancestors and parents, and to love children your own age.” (3) And he told him all the letters from Alpha to Omega, clearly and with great precision. But Jesus looked at the teacher Zacchaeus and said to him, “Since you do not know the true nature of Alpha, how can you teach anyone Beta? You hypocrite! If you know, first teach Alpha, and then we will believe you about Beta.” So he began to question the teacher about the first letter, and he was unable to give him the answers. (4) While many others were listening, the child said to Zacchaeus, “Listen, teacher, to the arrangement of the first letter of the alphabet; observe here how it has lines, and a middle stroke crossing both the lines you see, how they converge with the top projecting and returning, three marks of the same kind, each principal and subordinate, of equal proportion. 3 Now you have the lines of Alpha.

7

(1) When the teacher Zacchaeus heard the child presenting so many allegorical interpretations of the first letter, he was completely lost regarding this kind of explanation and its teaching, and said to those present: “Woe to me! I am miserable and utterly lost; I have shamed myself, taking on this child. (2) I beg you, brother Joseph, take him away. I cannot bear his stern gaze nor understand a single word. This child is not of this world; he can even tame fire. Perhaps he was born before the world began. I cannot understand what kind of womb

bore him or what kind of belly nourished him. Woe to me, friend! He confuses me; I cannot follow his reasoning. I have deceived myself and am wretched three times. I was struggling to have a student and discovered I had a teacher. (3) My friends, I know my shame well: though I am an old man, I have been defeated by a child. I may grow weak and die because of this child, for at this moment I cannot look him in the face. When everyone says that I have been defeated by a child, what can I say? How can I explain the things he told me about the lines of the first letter? I have no idea, my friends, for I do not know its beginning or end. (4) And so I ask you, Brother Joseph, take him back home. What kind of great thing he could be—whether a divine being or an angel—I do not even know what to say".

8

(1) While the Jews were giving Zacchaeus advice, the child laughed loudly and said, "Now let what is yours bear fruit, and bring sight to the blind in heart. I have come from above to curse you and call you to the kingdom above, just as he who sent me for your sake commanded." (2) When the child stopped speaking, immediately all who had fallen under his curse were healed. No one dared to anger him from that moment on, fearing that he might cripple them with a curse.

The Second Teacher of the Child Jesus

14

(1) When Joseph observed the child's mind and age, and saw that he was beginning to mature, he again decided that he should not be unable to read, and so he took him away and gave him to another teacher. The teacher said to Joseph, "First I will teach him to read Greek, and then Hebrew." For the teacher knew of the child's learning and was afraid of him. However, he wrote the alphabet and practiced for him for a long time; but the child gave him no answer. (2) Then Jesus said to him, "If you are truly a teacher and know the

letters well, tell me the power of Alpha, and I will tell you the power of Beta." The teacher became angry and struck him on the head. The child was hurt and cursed him; and immediately he fainted and fell to the ground with his face to the ground. (3) The child returned to Joseph's house. Joseph was overcome with grief and ordered his mother, "Do not let him go out the door; for those who anger him die."

The Third Teacher of the Child Jesus

15

(1) Some time later, there was another instructor, a close friend of Joseph's, who said to him, "Bring the child to me at school. Perhaps I can use the encouragement to teach him his letters." Joseph said to him, "If you are so brave, brother, take him along with you." He took him with great fear and anxiety, but the child went along happily. (2) He entered the school confidently and found a book on the reading table. He picked it up, but instead of reading the words in it, he opened his mouth and began to speak in the Holy Spirit, teaching the Law to those present. A large crowd gathered and listened; they were amazed at the beauty of his teachings and his carefully crafted words—amazed that he could speak such things, even though he was still a child. (3) But when Joseph heard about this, he was frightened. He ran to the school, worried that this instructor might also have shown himself to be inexperienced. But the teacher said to Joseph, "You should know, brother, that I took the child as a student; but he is full of great grace and wisdom. Now I beg you, brother, take him home." (4) When the child heard these things, he immediately laughed at him and said, "Since you have spoken correctly and testified correctly, because of you the other one who was injured will be healed." And immediately the other teacher was healed. Joseph took the child and returned home. (Infancy Gospel of Thomas, 06-08 and 14-15; EHRMAN and PLESE, 2011: 12-17 and 19-21; ELLIOTT,

2005: 76-9 and for an overview of Jesus' literacy in the Apocrypha, see: ELLIOTT, 2006: 143-52).

Not only this passage, but the rest of this Gospel is filled with humor. One of the most comical passages is the miracle of the boy Jesus stretching a wooden beam as if it were made of rubber for his father, the carpenter Joseph, in 13:1-2:

(1) Now his father was a carpenter, and at that time he made plows and yokes. He received a request from a rich man to make a bed for him. But when one of the beams, the so-called crossbeam, was too short, he did not know what to do. The boy Jesus said to his father Joseph, "Lay the two pieces of wood on the ground and align them from the middle to one end." (2) Joseph did exactly as the boy said. Then Jesus stood at the other end, took the shorter board, and stretched it so that it was the same length as the other. His father Joseph saw what he had done and was amazed. He embraced the child and kissed him, saying, "I am blessed that God has given me this child" (The Infancy Gospel of Thomas, 13.01-2; EHRMAN and PLESE, 2011: 19 and ELLIOTT, 2005: 78-9).

Another apocryphal text that recounts the literacy of the infant Jesus is The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew §31. This text is problematic due to the diversity of versions and reconstructions over time, resulting in editions differing on many points, especially the length of the text. Bart D. Ehrman and Zlakto Plese published a Latin text and English translation with 24 paragraphs, Aurelio de Santos Otero published a Greek text and Spanish translation with 19 paragraphs, and J. K. Elliott published an English translation with 42 paragraphs.

III.07.02. In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew

31

"... A second time, the teacher Zacchaeus, a lawyer, said to Joseph and Mary, 'Give me the child, and I will hand him over to the teacher Levi, who will teach him the letters and instruct him.' Then Joseph

and Mary, calming Jesus, took him to school so he could learn the letters from the old Levi. And as soon as he entered, he held his tongue. And the teacher Levi said a letter to Jesus, and, beginning with the first letter Aleph, said to him, ‘Answer.’ But Jesus was silent and made no answer. Therefore the teacher Levi became angry, and took his staff of stacte and struck him on the head. And Jesus said to the teacher Levi, ‘Why do you strike me? You shall know for a truth, that the one who is struck can teach the one who strikes him more than the one who is struck can teach him. For I can teach you the same things that you is saying. But all these are blind men who speak and hear, like sounding brass or a clanging cymbal, in whom there is no perception of those things which are signified by their sound.' And Jesus further said to Zacchaeus, 'Each letter from Aleph to Thet is known by its arrangement. Say first, therefore, what Thet is, and I will tell you what Aleph is.' And again Jesus said to them, 'Those who do not know Aleph, how can they say Thet, the hypocrites? Tell me which is the first, Aleph; and then I will believe you when you have said Beth.' And Jesus began to ask the names of the letters one by one, and said, 'Let the teacher of the law tell us what the first letter is, or why it has many forms.' And when Levi heard this, he was astonished at such an arrangement of the names of the letters. (Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, § 31; ELLIOTT, 2005: 90 and 2006: 145-8).

Note that, unlike the previous text, this one mentions the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (Aleph א, Thet ט, and Beth ב), instead of the letters of the Greek alphabet (Alpha α and Beta β).[10] That is, in

10 For Jews, the Hebrew alphabet is not just any alphabet; it is sacred and filled with metaphysical, theological, magical, angelic, and supernatural meanings, just as Sanskrit is for Hindus and Arabic for Muslims. Each letter (22 in total, from Aleph to Thau) is related to God (represented by the letter Aleph), angels, various epithets of God, forces of nature, the heavens, the worlds, etc.—especially when interpreted by Kabbalists. Therefore, learning the letters of the Hebrew language is not like learning alphabets without theological significance. Therefore, their interpretation requires preparation and study.

the first case, he was being taught to read and write in Hebrew, and in the second, in Greek, respectively. This second form of literacy is certainly a fiction, since Jesus did not know Greek, as it was the language spoken in large centers by administrators, along with Latin —that is, it was the language of the educated classes—and Jesus lived in an illiterate rural region. At that time, Hebrew was no longer a daily language in Palestine; it survived only as the language of scripture and liturgy. The spoken language was Aramaic, a Semitic language spoken by ancient peoples of Mesopotamia and Syria, which spread throughout the surrounding regions, with dialectal developments, as well as adaptations to Hebrew, learned by the Jews during the Babylonian captivity. As a result, the Jews, over time, abandoned the everyday use of Hebrew. Although a colloquial language of the Jews, parts of the biblical books Ezra and Daniel, as well as the Talmud, were written in Aramaic (MEIER, 1991: vol. 1, 262).

III.07.03. In the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, XLVIII-LXLVIII

The Confused Teacher

1. There was a certain Zacchaeus in Jerusalem who devoted himself to teaching children. One day he said to Joseph, "Why don't you bring Jesus to me so I can teach him the letters?" Joseph agreed and went to tell Mary, and they took him to the teacher's house. Seeing him, the teacher asked him about the alphabet and ordered him to pronounce the letter Aleph. When he had said Aleph, the teacher ordered him to pronounce Beth. Jesus then replied, "First tell me what the letter Aleph means, and then I will pronounce the letter Beth for you."

2. When the teacher threatened him with a whip, Jesus explained the meaning of the letters Aleph and Beth, as well as the shapes of the letters, which were twisted, which spiraled, which pointed, and which

not, because one letter preceded the other. And many things of this kind the teacher had never heard or read in his life. Jesus finally said to the teacher, "Pay attention while I explain." And he began to clearly recite Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleph, and even Thau. And the teacher, filled with admiration, exclaimed, "This child was born before Joseph, I suppose." Then the teacher addressed Joseph in these terms: "You brought this child to me for instruction, and it turns out that he is more learned than all the teachers." And finally he said to Mary, "Your son has no need of instruction".

XLIX The Punished Teacher

1. They then took him to a more learned teacher, who, upon seeing him, ordered him to pronounce the letter Aleph. When he had done so, he said to him, "Now say the letter Beth." Jesus replied, "First tell me the meaning of the letter Aleph, and then I will pronounce the letter Beth." Then the teacher raised his hand to strike him with a whip, but his hand became dry, and he died instantly.

Jesus the Teacher

3. The chief among the teachers again said to him, "Do you read books?" "Yes, I do," said Jesus, "and everything contained in them." And he immediately began to explain to them the books of the Law (Torah), the precepts, and the statutes. and the mysteries contained in the prophets, things that do not reach the human intelligence of any creature. Then said the doctor, "I, for my part, have to confess that until now I have not had the opportunity to learn, nor ever heard such things." "What kind of person will this boy be?" (Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, XLVII-L – OTERO, 1956: 354-5).

It appears that this passage was composed to complement the episode in Luke 2:41-52, when Jesus was with his family in Jerusalem, suddenly disappeared from his parents. After days of searching, he was finally found in a temple, engaged in a dialogue

with doctors and scholars of Israel. However, in the canonical passage, nothing is mentioned regarding the content of the dialogue with the doctors.

III.08. In the Apocryphal Letters

Another mention of Jesus' ability to read and write is found outside the apocryphal gospels, namely in a correspondence between the ruler of Edessa, Abgarus, and Jesus. Therefore, these are apocryphal letters, reproduced in Greek in Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History. In the first letter, Abgarus claimed that he had been informed of Jesus' miraculous and healing powers, so he invited him to come to Edessa to to cure him of an illness. Jesus, in turn, replied that “regarding your request for me to come to you, I must complete all that I was sent to do here, and after the fulfillment, I will ascend to Him who sent me, after my ascension, I will send to you one of my disciples to cure your illness and provide life for both you and those who are with you” (EHRMAN and PLESE, 2011: 216-7 and OTERO, 1956: 710-1).

The above correspondence suggests that Jesus was able to read and write, as he received a letter from Abgarus and responded to it. However, as noted earlier, the proportion of illiterate people in antiquity was very high, so it was common to use or hire scribes to read or write letters or documents. Writing took place through the dictation of the sender of the letter or the author of the document, so the scribe was merely the agent of communication. An example of this occurrence in the New Testament can be found in 1 Peter 5:12, where the apostle Peter said in a letter: "Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written (ἔγραψα – egrapsa) this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God..." (NRSVUE, 2021). From the text of the letter it is possible to extract three hypotheses: that the apostle Peter wrote the letter and it was sent through Silvanus, therefore Peter was literate, or that the letter was dictated by Peter and written by Silvanus, therefore

Peter did not have the ability to write, or that the letter was dictated by Peter to Silvanus, who also sent it. These last two hypotheses seem to be the most likely, since in another passage, now in Acts of the Apostles 4.13, Peter is pointed out as illiterate: “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were illiterate (ἀγράμματοί – agrammatoi) and laymen (ἰδιῶται – idiotai), …” (NRSVUE, 2021).[11] In order to soften the idea of ignorance of these apostles, some authors translate agrammatoi as “uneducated”, and idiotai as “common men”, claiming, as Craig A. Evans did, that agrammatoi are only those with a lack of scribal training, that is, those who are not professional scribes, and idiotai are those outside the field, or outside the group. That is, in contrast to the professionally trained priests and scribes (EVANS, 2007: 42). In other words, something like an intermediate position between nearly illiterate and nearly literate. Craig A. Evans's argument is worthy of consideration, but everything will depend on how illiteracy and literacy are defined. If both are understood as the inability and ability to read and write, respectively, his argument is merely a euphemistic attempt to claim that both apostles could have known how to read and write, but lacked an advanced formal education, which is not explicitly demonstrated in other passages of the Gospels.

Another mention of Jesus' ability to read appears in the apocryphal text "The Letter of Joseph of Arimathea" 4.03, when

11 The plural noun ἰδιῶται – idiotai, translated here as “laymen”, is problematic to translate. Etymologically, it derives from the prefix ἴδιος (idios), which means one’s own, private (as opposed to public), someone not involved in public affairs, peculiar or specific, layman, plebeian, unskilled, and the suffix ώτης (otes), used to form various kinds of nouns. It can also mean illiterate or ignorant, but these are not the most frequent meanings, as many editions of the Bible translate. Translated in the Latin Vulgate as “idiōtae”, idiots, ignorant, illiterate or lacking in education, etymologically derived from the Greek ἰδιῶται (idiotai), see: BEEKES, 2010: 577-8; LIDDELL and SCOTT, 1940; TORRINHA, 1937: 390 and LEWIS and SHORT, 1879.

Jesus reads aloud a letter sent by the Cherubim, in a highly mythological passage. The text of the letter is as follows:
"We, the Cherubim and the Six-Winged Creatures, who have been commanded by your divinity to guard the garden of paradise, are declaring this through the thief who was crucified with you according to your plan. When we saw the mark of the nails on the thief crucified with you and the splendor of your divine being in the letter that was sent, the fire that is here was extinguished, for it could not withstand the brightness of the mark; and we were terrified, overcome with great fear—for we heard that the creator of heaven and earth and all creation moved his dwelling from the heights to the lower regions of the earth, on account of Adam, the firstborn." For when we saw the spotless cross shining like lightning through the thief, its light, seven times brighter than the bright, trembling sun, reached us, as we held fast in the convulsions of the underworld. With a great shout, the ministers of Hades, together with us, cried out: 'Holy, holy, holy, he who is in the beginning, in the highest places.' And the powers sent up a cry: 'O Lord, you have appeared in heaven and on earth, and have brought joy to the ages, having saved your own creation from death' (EHRMAN, 2011: 580-3).

Part Four

Conclusion

Jesus as “Teacher”

In some passages of the canonical Gospels, Jesus is called ῥαββί-rabbi (rabbi),[12] a Greek noun of Aramaic and Hebrew origin, or ραββουνι - rabbouni (an alternative form of rabbi),[13] also a Greek noun of Hebrew origin. It is also called ἐπιστάτα – epistata,[14] a Greek noun in the vocative case of ἐπιστάτης – epistatens, commonly translated as “teacher,” a word with a problematic translation, as the meanings found in dictionaries are: supplicant, chief, commander, assembly president, superintendent, and administrator.[15] Or, διδάσκαλε - didaskale (o teacher), a Greek noun in the vocative case of διδάσκαλος – didaskalos (teacher),[16] however some dictionaries mention it as “teacher of boys” (it can also mean “workmaster”), perhaps with the intention of pointing to Jesus as a lesser teacher, due to his precarious formal education. The issue of illiteracy and low literacy in a culturally precarious rural region, such as the one in which Jesus lived, when someone, even reasonably literate, infiltrates the place, reminds us of the popular saying, "In the land of blinds, the one-eyed man is king." That is, a semi-literate person who teaches in a rural region to an illiterate population will undoubtedly be considered a master" by the ignorant local population, while if this same semi-literate master goes to Harvard University, he will be

12 Matthew 23.07; Mark 9.05 e 14.45.
13 Mark 10:51; John 20:16 and 31:38.
14 Luke 5:05; 8:24 and 45; 9:33 and 49; 17:13.
15 See: LIDDELL: 1940.
16 Matthew 8:19; 9:11; 12:38; Mark 4:28; 5:35; 9:17; 10:17 and 20; 12:14; 19:32; Luke 19:39; John 1:38; 3:32.

considered illiterate. In other words, the concept of master depends on the level of literacy in the master/disciple relationship, as well as on the circumstances, time, and region where the relationship takes place. When an illiterate peasant calls someone with limited literacy "master," it's the same as an illiterate peasant calling a healer "doctor," a midwife "nurse," or a bricklayer "architect." A very different circumstance is when a university professor calls a Nobel Prize winner a master. Also, in the past, to be called a master required far less education than a teacher today, given that knowledge has increased greatly from antiquity to the present day. As for the difference between regions, it's impossible to compare a precarious teacher in a rural region with a teacher in the important cultural centers, academies, and libraries of antiquity, namely Athens, Alexandria, Pergamum, and Rome. For those who believe Jesus was a master, if the illiteracy rate in rural Palestine around the first century CE was 95%, then Jesus was a teacher for an illiterate population.

Exact numbers are difficult to ensure, but a comparative standard can be used. When we go back in time, what we observe is that the older civilizations are, the greater the proportion of peasant population in relation to urban population; that is, the more ancient peoples were more rural than urban. As a result, urban centers were more literate than rural sectors. Rapid growth in the urban population occurred after the Industrial Revolution (19th century). The total literacy rate of Jews in Israel in the first centuries CE was probably less than 3%. While this may seem very low by today's standards, it was relatively high in the ancient world. If we ignore women (based on their non-participation in society), consider only children over seven, forget distant farmers, and consider the literacy of uneducated people (e. g. someone who cannot read the Torah but can read a pamphlet, i. e. pragmatic literacy), then the literacy rate (adult men in urban centers) can be as high as 20%, a high rate for a society of Antiquity.

Furthermore, the fact that Jesus is called a rabbi, master, or teacher is not historical proof that he was truly learned, since the Gospels were composed by followers and admirers of Jesus, so personal feelings of admiration and praise were projected into the writings of these composers. Just as Jesus is called Lord or Our Lord, a feeling of reverence and admiration is also present in the composition of the texts, since he could be Lord to some and not to others who did not admire him. The projection of feelings of admiration and veneration by the composers of sacred texts is not exclusive to early Christians, but common in all religions, so a historian must be careful in evaluating these types of compositions. Also note the precarious conditions of the apostles; they were practically beggars, unemployed or underemployed, some illiterate (Peter and John), and almost destitute. Furthermore, when those who argue for Jesus' literacy point out that in the canonical gospels Jesus quoted and discussed scripture with other rabbis, although the quotations from scriptural passages are reproduced, it is not impossible that Jesus knew the scriptures by heart, a common practice in antiquity. Meanwhile, discussions with the scribes and rabbis about what Jesus was discussing with them are not reproduced, which prevents us from knowing the degree of intellectuality of these discussions, which could range from trivialities to complex theological themes. Ultimately, simply quoting numerous passages from dozens of biblical scriptures is not sufficient proof of reading ability, as many ancient religious people knew the scriptures by heart, especially in rural areas where education was absent or precarious. Many people do not know, or have never researched the subject, how much knowledge and skill in discussion can be achieved through oral learning alone. I witnessed this feat during my stay in India with Hindu devotees in the 1980s. My Sanskrit instructor's wife knew dozens of long hymns and hundreds of shlokas (verses) from the scriptures (in Sanskrit and Tamil) by heart, and it was very pleasant to hear her sing, as she had a beautiful voice. Therefore, it is first necessary to understand how much, in

Jewish schools of the first century CE, learning was through written means and how much through oral means.

The history of Rabbinic Judaism reveals that the title "rabbi" in the time of Jesus, in the first century CE, did not have the same meaning and formality that it obtained after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, hence the historical differentiation between Ancient Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism (from the codification of the Talmud in the 6th century CE), as it did not require training, education and ordination, such as happened in the following centuries with the rabbinate. Therefore, the designation "rabbi," in the first century CE, was an informal designation, perhaps used more as a term of respect and admiration, than as someone with a formal religious ordination. Furthermore, the passage in Mark 1:22, when Jesus is admired by those present in the temple, "They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (NRSVU, 2021), is not proof of Jesus' literacy, as the admiration may have been due to his oratory, and not to his literacy and knowledge, given that oratory and persuasion are achieved through oral learning. To be persuasive, one must speak in a language that appeals to the listening audience, so the use of rhetorical language appropriate for the peasant population carries more authority than erudite language, which is difficult for a peasant to understand. Since almost everyone, especially peasants, is unfamiliar with pedantry, rhetorical and persuasive language has more effect on them than erudite language, consequently leading them to believe that persuasion has more authority than reasoning and demonstration. Thus, the passage "for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" is not proof that what Jesus taught was more well-founded, as Jesus could have spoken in language more understandable to the peasant, which was perceived as more authoritative by the audience, especially with the use of "commonplaces" (rhetorical words and phrases accepted by all listeners, which carry a persuasive effect). Therefore, it is impossible to decide with certainty on this question, since what

Jesus taught in the temple is not mentioned, which leaves us uninformed about the content of his teaching. It is not strictly necessary to be literate to be eloquent, as this is a skill learned through oral communication, especially in that time and region. Likewise, confident speech conveys authority, thus having a convincing effect. Ultimately, Jesus was perhaps a skilled and eloquent illiterate speaker, which is why his preaching was effective.

Furthermore, regarding the teacher/disciple relationship, Jesus' followers are called μαθηταὶ - mathetai (disciples) in the canonical gospels,[17] implying that if Jesus had disciples, then he was a teacher. This relationship reminds us, once again, of the phrase quoted above: "In the land of blinds, the one-eyed man is king." As can be gleaned from the canonical gospels, these "disciples" of Jesus were needy, beggars, unemployed, and some were illiterate. Therefore, for those in these conditions, "every crumb is food for the poor." Therefore, Craig A. Evans's argument that Jesus was not just any peasant, but someone exceptional, as well as a "master" who had "disciples" (2006: 48s.), may have some truth, but if so, he was, at most, someone who knew a little more than those around him, which is why he was called a "master." Thus, more specifically, if we believe in Jesus's literacy, he was at best functionally literate and at worst functionally illiterate.

Among Christians who recognize Jesus's illiteracy, the argument is put forward that "literacy is not the same as wisdom, for Jesus may not have been literate, but he had wisdom." The concept of "wisdom" has as many degrees as the concept of literacy. Since what was wisdom in the past is no longer wisdom today, what is wisdom in rural areas is not wisdom in urban areas. Therefore, what is wisdom for an illiterate person is not wisdom for an educated person, and so on. In the distant past, in an isolated rural region, recognizing that "the day dawns because the rooster crows," or that "the day darkens because the owl wakes," or that "it rains because

17 Mark 2:16, 18, 23; 3:7 and 9; 4:34; 5:31; Luke 6:20; 10:23; 12:22; 14:26-7.

the cicada sings" was peasant wisdom; however, today we know with absolute certainty that it was astronomical and meteorological ignorance.

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